

VZCZCXRO8778
PP RUEHAG RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHLB #0305/01 0751848
ZNY CCCCC ZZH (CCY AD40FB7D MSI7316-632)
P 161848Z MAR 09 ZDS CTG RUEHSD 0144 0830135/VOL TO ALL
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4459
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 3582
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 3785
RHMFISS/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 06 BEIRUT 000305

C O R R E C T E D COPY (PARA 8/9)

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA
ALSO FOR IO ACTING A/S WARLICK
P FOR DRUSSELL, RRANGASWAMY
USUN FOR WOLFF/GERMAIN/SCHEDLBAUER
NSC FOR SHAPIRO, MCDERMOTT
DOD/OSD FOR FLOURNOY/KAHL/DALTON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/15/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [KPAL](#) [LE](#) [SY](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: LEBANON: DESPITE FRICTION, MARCH 14 UNITES TO
LAUNCH CAMPAIGN

REF: DAMASCUS 202

BEIRUT 00000305 001.3 OF 006

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) The March 14 coalition publicly launched its political platform for the June 7 parliamentary elections at its second annual convention on Saturday, March 14. Entitled "Towards A Strong Viable State," the platform stressed the importance of adhering to the Taif agreement and the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, protecting Lebanon from Israeli aggression and fully implementing UNSCR 1701 among its 14 points. The coalition's candidates for the June 7 election were not announced. Speakers at the convention called on fellow coalition members and eventual parliamentary candidates to remain united, although internal frictions nearly threatened to keep at least one leader from attending. Public reaction to the convention was largely indifferent despite some acknowledgment that the convention's occurrence was a positive step forward. End summary.

MARCH 14 OUTLINES
POLITICAL PLATFORM

¶2. (SBU) On Saturday, March 14, leaders of the March 14 coalition gathered at a rally attended by several thousand faithful at the BIEL Center in Beirut to launch their unified political platform. March 14 Secretary General Fares Souaid delivered the official platform, which consisted of 14 points. (See paragraph 7 for full text). Notable among them were calls to protect Lebanon from Israeli aggression, recover Shebaa farms through full implementation of UNSCR 1701, and for the exercise of state authority throughout all of Lebanon's territory, in accordance with the Taif, agreement. (which stipulates that "there shall be no weapons or authority in Lebanon except the weapons and authority of the state.") The platform also cited UNSCR 1701 as the means to achieve Lebanon's independence, prosperity and stability.

13. (SBU) Uncharacteristically for March 14, the platform also called for ending the conflict with Syria and "constructing normal and amicable relations in accordance with the Taif agreement and on the basis of brotherhood, equality and common interests," under certain conditions. The conditions included border delineation, disarmament of Palestinian groups outside the refugee camps, and the release of Lebanese prisoners held in Syrian jails. (Note: Politicians from across the political spectrum, including arch-Syrian foe Samir Geagea, have been referring to "sisterly" Syria recently. Press and reftel report that Lebanon opened its Embassy in Damascus today, March 16, and will send an Ambassador shortly. End note.)

14. (U) The coalition also committed itself to support the Palestinian Authority under the leadership of Mahmoud Abbas and stated it "would support the struggle of the Palestinian people under the leadership of the PLO in order to establish an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital." Commitment to the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, the return of all locally displaced to their home villages, women's rights, and protecting the environment also were highlighted.

SAFADI, AHDAB AND
SHIA FIGURES ABSENT
FROM CONVENTION

15. (SBU) In a rare public appearance together on the same stage, majority leader Saad Hariri, Lebanese Forces (LF) leader Samir Geagea, Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, and former president Amine Gemayel attended the launch. Ministers Nassib Lahoud, Jean Oghassapian and MPs Nayla Mouawad, Samir Franjiyeh, Boutros Harb, Elias Atallah were among the other

BEIRUT 00000305 002.3 OF 006

notable figures present. Carlos Edde, dean of the National Bloc party, who announced last year his resignation from March 14, Dory Chamoun, head of the National Liberal Party, and journalist May Chidiac also were present and among those called up to the stage at the end of the rally.

16. (C) Noticeably absent were two Sunnis from Tripoli, Minister of Economy and Trade Mohammad Safadi and MP Mosbah al Ahdab, and any significant representative of Shia. Safadi cited health reasons; on the other hand, Ahdab, who did not attend the 2008 convention, told Pol/Econ Chief on March 10 that, while still allied with March 14, he preferred to maintain his independence vis--vis the coalition. Shia notable figures such as Mufti Sayyed Ali al-Amin from Tyre and former Ambassador Khalil al-Khalil were absent, despite their attendance at the 2008 convention. March 14 member and part of the General Secretariat, Michel Mecattaf, told us that the Mufti was represented by his son, Hadi.

17. (SBU) Diplomatic representation was light this year compared to last, although the presence of both the U.S. and Mexican Ambassadors prompted Souaid to thank the support of March 14's friends from "both North and South America." The Jordanian DCM also attended. Media highlighted the attendance of the Ambassador.

COMMENT

18. (C) As late as 24 hours before the convention, disagreements between March 14 leaders threatened to prevent their joint appearance. Jumblatt, in particular, sought to tone down language that he feared would provoke Hizballah. Friction among Jumblatt and Hariri, stemming from Jumblatt's complaint that Hariri is not providing financial resources and Jumblatt's concerns about sectarian tensions, continue to manifest themselves. Most obvious in this regard is Jumblatt's sympathy for a new national unity government, in direct contrast with Hariri's repeated assertions that March

14 will not rule with the opposition. Jumblatt also faces problems with Gemayel and Geagea over candidate selection in the Chouf and other areas and with Hariri over candidate selection in Rashaya (Jumblatt reportedly favors cutting a deal with Nabih Berri's Amal party there). In the end, Hariri, Geagea, Jumblatt, and Gemayel attended the launch, but their uncomfortable body language -- and Jumblatt's positioning himself two MPs away from Hariri -- hinted at the troubles within. March 14 Secretariat and Kataeb member Michel Khoury grabbed Pol/Econ Chief on the way out, pleading for the U.S. to intervene to reconcile the bickering coalition leaders. Public reaction to the convention was largely indifferent, with several contacts telling us they will wait for the announcement of the candidates before making electoral predictions. On the positive side, March 14 now has a clear platform supported by all of its members.
End Comment.

FULL TEXT OF
POLITICAL PLATFORM

19. (U) Begin text of the informal translation of the speech delivered by March 14 SYG Fares Souaid (NOTE: Entire text of speech is UNCLASSIFIED.):

Quote:

Fellow Lebanese,

On the seventh of June, you have a date with pivotal parliamentary elections that will occur in light of major regional and international changes. These elections are like a referendum on Lebanon's future and on the project of the building of the state. At the ballots, you decide for yourselves in eighty five days to whom you will give the mandate.

Yes, Lebanon, the nation, the people, and the state, Lebanon the role, and the message, stands today at the crossroads of

BEIRUT 00000305 003.4 OF 006

SUBJECT: LEBANON: DESPITE FRICTION, MARCH 14 UNITES TO
LAUNCH CAMPAIGN

difficult and fateful choices between:

- A nation that is constantly threatened, or a safe and finally secure nation for all its citizens;
- Citizens that are blown away by internal and external intention, or citizens that are united on their destinies and big issues;
- A deferred state, or a present and strong state for all and above all;
- Regression towards the paths of civil wars, or a strong will to maintain the solid sense of co-existence;
- Lebanon that answers to another state, or Free and independent Arab Lebanon;
- Lebanon the unpunished crime, or Lebanon the truth and justice;
- The slope towards the abyss of underdevelopment, or stability, business opportunities, and prosperity;

Since our beloved Lebanon stands today at these fateful crossroads, your vote will not only affect your general situation for the next four years. It will also determine the quality of your future and the pattern of your lifestyle for the coming decades.

Know that your vote is a duty and a responsibility: duty to participate in the determination of your fate, and your responsibility on your choices and their implications. Your right for free choice is sacred, but the right of your nation on you is to make the best choice, for your nation, for you, and for the future of your children.

Fellow Lebanese,

Lebanon's salvation and protection demand the accordance of

the Lebanese people to not let it be used politically, militarily, and securely in regional conflicts that have nothing to do with national interests, with Lebanon holding all its political and diplomatic commitments towards the Arab solidarity and the rightful Arab issues, and especially the Palestinian cause. The path to achieving this vital target for Lebanon's independence, stability, and prosperity, is to implement the international resolution 1701 which provides the necessary framework and tools to do so. This decision is not one of a 'party' or a 'faction' imposed by March 14 forces. It is a decision that was agreed on unanimously by the Lebanese, including March 8 forces who signed on it twice: the first time in 2006 in order to stop the brutal Israeli aggression, and the second time in 2008 in the statement of the current government.

This issue is the path, or rather the basis to reflect the legitimate aspirations to:

¶1. Protect Lebanon from the Israeli aggressions and recovering Shebaa Farms through the implementation of resolution 1701 in all its clauses.

¶2. Impose the state authority over all its territory in accordance with the Taef agreement where 'there will be no weapons or authority in Lebanon except the weapons and authority of the state'.

¶3. End of the conflict with Syria which adopted since 1947 the policy of military neutrality, and construct normal and amicable relations in accordance with the Taef agreement and on the basis of brotherhood, equality, and common interests. This calls for the end of Syrian interference in the Lebanese affairs, and the completion of the diplomatic exchange which is considered as an accomplishment for the independent Lebanon, as well as border control and demarcation starting with Shebaa farms in order to facilitate its retrieval, and an end to the issue of the Lebanese detainees in Syrian prisons, the abolition of military bases that are present outside the camps that are technically under the authority of the Syrian authority, and the review of the unfair agreements that were signed during the period of Syrian tutelage on Lebanon.

¶4. Provide harmony between Lebanon and the international

BEIRUT 00000305 004.4 OF 006

community on the basis of the Charter of the United Nations and the international resolutions, and avoid pushing Lebanon to confront the international community with sectarian claims that contradict its actual interest, and with convulsive slogans that are far away from its nature of pluralism, as well as reactivate Lebanon's message of co-existence and cultural interaction through supporting the initiatives that make Lebanon 'an international center for dialog among civilizations and cultures, and a global laboratory for this dialog', according to the suggestion of the President of the Lebanese Republic.

¶5. Restore Lebanon's Arab role and its active contribution in achieving Arab solidarity which is the basic requirement to obtain Arab rights, and its commitment to support the struggle of the Palestinian people and their unity led by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in order to establish an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital in the context of the 'two-state solution' and a just and comprehensive peace in accordance with the 'Arab Peace Initiative' in the face of the escalation of extremism, especially Israeli extremism and the policy of settlement and the expulsion of Palestinians from their homeland.

¶6. Strict adherence to prevent the settlement of our Palestinian brothers in Lebanon, and the adoption of the law of constitutional amendment proposal made by the Parliament members of March 14 regarding this subject more than six

months ago which requires a Parliamentary consensus to amend the constitution clause that has to do with settlement.

¶17. Complete the construction of the state and its institutions on the basis of the Charter of co-existence through the implementation of the Taef agreement and the constitution in letter and spirit, leading to a civilized democratic state that ensures equality in rights and duties of individuals regardless of their religious affiliations, as well as ensuring free and active presence of communities, irrespective of any political or numerical consideration, adopting a new law for elections and reducing the voting age to 18 years, reforming the state institutions and departments, and liberating them from the sectarian conflicts and political clientele and corruption, all in the context of the expanded administrative decentralization, and the commitment of those in authority to their jurisdiction that is specified in the constitution in order to prevent the blocking actions from being done again.

¶18. Commit to achieve the requirements of the International Tribunal for Lebanon whose purpose is to uncover the truth and achieve justice, which will fortify Lebanon's sovereignty and will put an end to the trend of political assassinations and impunity, and will give credit back to the law as a regulator of life among the people, in parallel with strengthening the judiciary independence and effectiveness.

¶19. Provide the necessary funds to complete the return of all the displaced people and close the file once and for all.

¶10. Protect Lebanon and the Lebanese internally and abroad from the global financial crisis repercussions and maintain the monetary stability, and keep the inflation at low levels to protect the purchasing power for those who have limited income, and develop an effective program for debt management and debt reduction, and maximum benefit from the contributions of Paris-3.

¶11. Commit to economic and financial policies that have balanced development dimensions in all productive sectors along all Lebanese regions, and remove the obstacles away from the investments and reduce the cost of conducting business while giving priority to the sectors and the projects that provide suitable job opportunities for the Lebanese, and develop the social contract that is binding for the state and the social partners, and expand the scope of health, educational, social, and relief services which commensurate with the needs and basic rights of the citizens,

BEIRUT 00000305 005.2 OF 006

and activate the social safety nets for the poorest factions in collaboration with the civil society organizations.

¶12. Provide bigger and more effective participation for women in the political, economic, and social life, and in decision-making on the basis of equality in rights and in access to employment, education, health, and other community based opportunities and in owning and distributing resources, as well as empowering women legally through amending the unjust legislation and developing laws in this issue, especially the electoral law.

¶13. Commit to the cause of the Lebanese Diaspora in the world in order to provide a safety net in support of Lebanon's independence, stability, and prosperity, and achieving equality in duties and rights with the residents, especially the right to vote, which must be available to all expatriates in the place of residence, and work on facilitating the restoration the Lebanese nationality to all descendants of Lebanese origin , and facilitate the acquirement of the civil register to the Lebanese without administrative or legal complications, and granting incentives and facilities for the expatriates to work and invest in Lebanon.

¶14. Put an end to the environmental deterioration through a

national strategy for sustainable development that includes the issuance of regulatory decrees for the application of the environmental law, and implementing the environmental impact assessment decree, as well as offer economic incentives for the institutions that introduces the environmental component in its production process, as well as promote the use of renewable sources of energy, biological agriculture, protect the water resources and water quality, and promote tourism that respects the ecological balance, preserve the wealth of forest, and treatment of solid, liquid, and gas waste.

Fellow Lebanese,

On the basis of these options, March 14 pledges to enter into the coming electoral battle with interdependence and solidarity, in all electoral constituencies, and in collaboration with the forces and personalities that share these values and goals.

March 14 pledges to form a thorough parliamentary context inclusive of all the winners of March 14 forces in these elections.

The March 14 elected deputies in the coming parliament pledge to you the commitment to all the issues and pledge to work seriously and responsibly in achieving it.

March 14 forces pledge to return to the constitutional assets in the authority and in the opposition, with an openness to real representation in accordance with the rules of parliamentary democracy and away from the logic of disruption, whether from within or from outside the institutions.

Finally, March 14 forces, in the belief that the basic needs of citizens in their daily lives and the improvement of their living conditions are the initial task of any responsible national authority, and where political and security stability, and the independence of the national decision are the pillars to attract investments and stimulate the production wheel and create job opportunities and work on providing the necessary health and educational services for the citizens, puts in its priority, and as soon as the elections are done, the immediate call for an economic and social dialog that develops a charter for decent living in parallel to the charter of co-existence.

Fellow Lebanese,

The project of March 14 forces is not that of triumph or cancellation. It is a project to save Lebanon and the Lebanese; all the Lebanese.

BEIRUT 00000305 006.2 OF 006

We want to turn the page on the internal conflict, and re-connect what was lost between the Lebanese, and devote a peaceful and democratic approach in the political work and reject all internal violence.

On May 31, 2007, one day after the decision to create an international tribunal, we held our hand out to the other team and issued an invitation to revive the historical settlement which was identified by the Taef agreement. The other party did not meet the call. Instead they confronted us with blocking and sometimes with weapons! In spite the violence that we were faced with, we did not change our choice. Today, we renew this invitation, which verbally stated the following:

"The division that emerged at the moment of the second independence in 2005 was dangerous to Lebanon. Surpassing this division requires the surpassing of three necessities:

The necessity to consolidate two key achievements in the history of modern Lebanon - liberation, and independence-

instead of putting them, as the case is today, in confrontation with each other, which will lead to weakening these accomplishments and emptying them from contents (...)

Confessing the impossibility of building the state on the basis of sectarian dichotomies or troikas which Lebanon has paid the price for dearly in the previous stages. It is also impossible to build Lebanon by marginalizing or removing some of its sectarian components. Lebanon cannot be built on the image of one of its sects or on its conditions, and at the expense of its civilized quality that is formed on unity in diversity.

Confessing to the impossibility of building the state on the basis of giving priorities to the regional and external interests and ties instead of giving it to internal partnership and the national contract that are embodied by the constitution."

Fellow Lebanese,

The seventh of June 2009 is a pivotal stage in the historical path that you started on March 14 2005, a winding hard path where you lost lives and shed blood, but a path filled with the breath of freedom and regained sovereignty, and the independent national decision.

Let us make from 7 June a date to cross to the state of Lebanon:
Lebanon the Taef agreement
Lebanon the implementation of resolution 1701
Lebanon the Arab peace initiative.

End quote. End text.

SISON